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Serial No. 09/441,709

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For: DEFECT CORRECTION IN  
ELECTRONIC IMAGING SYSTEM




TRANSMITTAL OF CERTIFIED PRIORITY DOCUMENT

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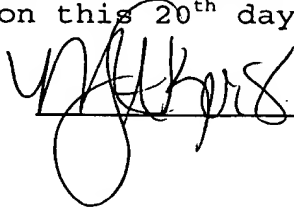
Transmitted herewith is a certified copy of the  
priority United Kingdom Application No. 9825086.3.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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2. Patent application number (The Patent Office will fill in this part)	<b>9825086.3</b>		<b>17 NOV 1998</b>
3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)	Vision Group plc Aviation House 31 Pinkhill Edinburgh EH12 7BF  Patents ADP number (if you know it) <b>-755 177 3081</b>  If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation <b>United Kingdom</b>		
4. Title of the invention	<b>"Defect Correction in Electronic Imaging Systems"</b>		
5. Name of your agent (if you have one)	<b>Murgitroyd &amp; Company</b>		
"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)	<b>373 Scotland Street          GLASGOW          G5 8QA</b>		
Patents ADP number (if you know it)	<b>1198013</b>		
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11.	I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.	
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	Murgitroyd & Company	16 November 1998
12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom	John Cooper	0141 307 8400

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1     **"Defect Correction in Electronic Imaging Systems"**

2

3     The present invention relates to methods and apparatus  
4     for correcting defects in video data generated by  
5     electronic imaging systems. The invention is most  
6     particularly concerned with the correction of defects  
7     arising from defective pixel sites in electronic image  
8     sensors, but is also applicable to more general noise  
9     reduction in video data streams. The invention is  
10    equally applicable to monochrome and colour video data  
11    and may be useful in relation to still imaging systems  
12    as well as kinematic video systems.

13

14    The majority of electronic imaging devices are now  
15    implemented using semiconductor technologies. Examples  
16    include the CCD, which is implemented using a form of  
17    MOS manufacturing process, and, more recently, image  
18    sensors manufactured using standard CMOS semiconductor  
19    processes.

20

21    In all of these cases, the sensor normally comprises a  
22    1- or 2-dimensional array of discrete pixels.

23

24    It is in the nature of the manufacturing processes  
25    employed in the production of such devices that

1 occasional defects occur at individual pixel sites.  
2 Such defects may variously cause the affected pixel to  
3 be unrepresentatively brighter or darker than the true  
4 image at that point (including the extreme cases of  
5 saturated white or black pixels).

6  
7 Such defects affect some proportion of the population  
8 of individual imaging devices ("chips") on each  
9 manufactured wafer. Chips so affected must normally be  
10 rejected for use unless the defects can in some way be  
11 masked or corrected. It is economically attractive to  
12 mask or correct defective pixels enabling otherwise  
13 rejected chips to be passed as good product. This  
14 improves the apparent yield of good imaging chips per  
15 wafer and thereby lowers the cost per usable chip.

16  
17 It is known in the art to calibrate imaging devices at  
18 the point of camera manufacture, so that the locations  
19 of defective pixels in the imaging array are identified  
20 and stored. In subsequent use of the device, pixel  
21 data from these locations is in some way masked or  
22 corrected in the live video data stream.

23  
24 One simple and well known masking technique is to  
25 substitute for the defective datum a copy of the value  
26 of a neighbouring pixel. More sophisticated techniques  
27 are also possible and typically may produce an estimate  
28 of the correct value of the defective pixel data by  
29 applying an algorithm to the data obtained from the  
30 neighbouring pixels in one or two dimensions.

31 Generally, the best correction filters use a mixture of  
32 linear and non-linear estimators and work on at least a  
33 3 x 3 pixel neighbourhood centred on the defective  
34 pixel.

35  
36 This prior technique of calibrating individual sensors



1 at the point of manufacture has two main disadvantages.  
2 Firstly, and most significantly, the process of  
3 calibrating the sensor to determine defect locations is  
4 an inconvenient and expensive manufacturing burden.  
5 Secondly, defects may sometimes be transient in nature,  
6 so that defects present and corrected for at the time  
7 of calibration may subsequently disappear, or, worse,  
8 new defects may occur subsequent to calibration. These  
9 latter defects will remain uncorrected in subsequent  
10 camera use and will show clearly as blemishes on the  
11 images output by the camera.  
12

13 It is a first object of the present invention to  
14 provide methods and apparatus for the correction of  
15 defects in electronic imaging systems which obviate or  
16 mitigate the above mentioned disadvantages of prior art  
17 image defect correction schemes.  
18

19 Whilst the invention may be implemented using known  
20 error correction algorithms for correcting the pixel  
21 values output by defective pixel sites, it is a further  
22 object of the invention to provide improved methods and  
23 apparatus for filtering video data signals, both for  
24 the purpose of correcting image defects originating  
25 from defective pixel sites and for more general noise  
26 reduction purposes.  
27

28 The invention, in its various aspects, is defined in  
29 the Claims appended hereto. Other features and aspects  
30 of the invention and of the preferred embodiments  
31 thereof will be apparent from the following  
32 description.  
33

34 Embodiments of the invention will now be described, by  
35 way of example only, with reference to the accompanying  
36 drawings, in which:

1 Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a  
2 first embodiment of the invention;

3  
4 Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a  
5 preferred embodiment of the invention;

6  
7 Figs. 3(a) and 3(b) are illustrations  
8 representing pixel neighbourhood locations  
9 employed in correcting image defects;

10  
11 Fig. 4 is a more detailed block diagram  
12 illustrating a particularly preferred  
13 implementation of the embodiment of Fig. 3; and

14  
15 Fig. 5 is a graph illustrating the operation  
16 of a digital filter employed in the  
17 embodiment of Fig. 4.

18  
19 Referring now to the drawings, Fig. 1 illustrates a  
20 first, most general embodiment of the invention.

21  
22 An image sensor 10 of known type comprises an array of  
23 pixels. The sensor array 10 outputs an analogue data  
24 stream which is converted to digital form by analogue  
25 to digital conversion means 12. Assuming a two  
26 dimensional pixel array, the data stream comprises a  
27 series of pixel values output line by line from the  
28 sensor 10. The digital data stream would normally be  
29 encoded by encoding means 14 in a manner to suit the  
30 intended end use of the video data.

31  
32 In accordance with the present invention, the live  
33 video data stream is filtered in real time by digital  
34 filter means 16 so as to correct or mask anomalous  
35 pixel values which are judged to arise from defective  
36 pixel sites in the sensor 10. Typically, the filter 16

1 judges a pixel value to be defective if it is  
2 significantly higher or lower than its neighbours in  
3 either one or two dimensions. The filter replaces the  
4 defective pixel value with a substitute value. The  
5 substitute value may be derived by any suitable  
6 algorithm, which may involve linear and/or non-linear  
7 processes which may operate on surrounding pixel data  
8 from a one- or two-dimensional neighbourhood  
9 surrounding the defective pixel value.

10  
11 The filter 16 works permanently on the normal sensor  
12 output and does not require the use of any reference  
13 scene or predetermined calibration data. Rather, the  
14 filter depends on predetermined criteria for  
15 identifying defective pixel values in the live data  
16 stream and on predetermined rules for deriving  
17 substitute pixel values to replace the defective pixel  
18 values.

19  
20 This "live" or "in-line" correction of defective pixels  
21 overcomes the manufacturing burden of prior art  
22 techniques and deals automatically with defects which  
23 arise after manufacture. It further provides a degree  
24 of noise filtering on noisy images, correcting  
25 excessively large single-pixel noise spikes.

26  
27 Applying automatic correction in this way to an entire  
28 image can, in some circumstances, cause an undesirable  
29 deterioration in the overall image quality unless the  
30 correction filter is constrained in severity. This  
31 limits the effectiveness of the technique in its most  
32 basic form.

33  
34 The Applicant has found that the most suitable class of  
35 pixel-correcting filter is one which uses the central  
36 pixel data itself as part of the data set used to

1 determine the correction to be applied. Typically,  
2 this means that the non-defective portions of the image  
3 (that is, the majority of each image) are unaffected by  
4 the presence of the correcting filter. The filter  
5 will, however, correct defects of large magnitude.

6  
7 Unfortunately, many defects which it would be desirable  
8 to correct are not of large magnitude. Typical  
9 examples are pixels with a significant gain error, or  
10 pixels which are stuck at an intermediate image value.  
11 It has not been found to be possible to devise a single  
12 filter which is capable of correcting for these more  
13 subtle defects which does not also falsely correct many  
14 non-defective pixels in a manner which has an  
15 undesirable effect on the overall image, such as by  
16 producing a smearing effect.

17  
18 Fig. 2 illustrates a preferred embodiment of the  
19 invention, in which the single filter 16 of Fig. 1 is  
20 replaced by first and second filter stages 18 and 22  
21 and a defect memory or database 20. In accordance with  
22 this scheme, the first filter stage 18 performs two  
23 functions. Firstly, it applies a more subtle  
24 correction algorithm to the complete data stream, so as  
25 to correct defects of lower magnitude as noted above.  
26 Secondly, it identifies pixels exhibiting more extreme  
27 defects, and passes information regarding these pixels  
28 to the defect memory 20, which stores information  
29 regarding those pixels which are judged to be most  
30 severely defective. The defect memory 20 controls the  
31 operation of the second filter stage 22, which applies  
32 more severe correction selectively to those pixels  
33 identified in the defect memory 20. Typically, the  
34 number of pixels for which severe correction is  
35 required will be less than 1% of the total pixel count.  
36 The pixel locations stored in the defect memory 20 are

1 restricted to those that, historically, appear to be  
2 most severely in error as detected by the first filter  
3 stage 18.

4  
5 That is, for each video frame (or for each still image  
6 captured by the sensor), all defects are monitored by  
7 the first filter stage 18 and those pixel locations  
8 exhibiting the largest apparent errors are added to the  
9 defect memory 20, if not already identified and stored.

10  
11 In order to enable the contents of the defect memory 20  
12 to remain dynamic over time, a management strategy is  
13 required so that locations representing transient noise  
14 defects or defects which disappear over time can be  
15 identified and removed from the defect memory 20.

16 Besides preventing future correction of non-defective  
17 pixel values, this also creates memory space for new or  
18 previously undetected defects (the memory space 20 is  
19 necessarily limited and it is desirable that it be as  
20 small as possible consistent with the number of defects  
21 which are likely to be encountered in practice).

22  
23 Typically, the defect memory 20 might store less than  
24 1% of all possible pixel locations. Accordingly, no  
25 more than 1% of pixels will be subject to severe  
26 correction. This proportion is so low as to be  
27 unnoticeable to a human observer of the corrected video  
28 or still image.

29  
30 A preferred embodiment of the scheme illustrated in  
31 Fig. 2 will now be described with reference to Figs. 4  
32 and 5.

33  
34 Referring firstly to Figs. 3(a) and 3(b), these  
35 illustrate examples of "pixel neighbourhoods" operated  
36 on by digital filters of the type employed in the

1 invention. In a two-dimensional pixel array, each  
2 pixel (neglecting the pixels at the edges of the array)  
3 is surrounded by eight immediately neighbouring pixels,  
4 forming a 3 x 3 array. The particular pixel operated  
5 on by a filter at any point in time is the central  
6 pixel  $p(c)$  of the 3 x 3 array. Fig. 3(a) illustrates  
7 the situation when the filter includes the central  
8 pixel value along with the values of the surrounding  
9 eight pixels in the dataset employed to determine a  
10 substitute value for  $p(c)$ . Fig. 3(b) illustrates the  
11 situation when the filter excludes the central pixel  
12 value from the dataset employed to determine a  
13 substitute value for  $p(c)$ . These two alternatives are  
14 both employed in the two stage filtering provided by  
15 the preferred embodiments of the present invention, as  
16 shall be described in greater detail below. It will be  
17 understood that the use of a 3 X 3 array for the filter  
18 dataset is merely an example, being particularly  
19 applicable to monochrome image sensors. Larger and/or  
20 differently oriented arrays may be appropriate in some  
21 circumstances, particularly for colour sensors, and the  
22 approach described in the present example can clearly  
23 be extended to other shapes or sizes of array.

24  
25 Referring now to Fig. 4, there is shown a block diagram  
26 of a video data filtering system corresponding to  
27 blocks 18, 20 and 22 of Fig. 2. The input data stream  
28 consists of a series of input pixel values  $p(in)$  and  
29 the output datastream consists of a series of output  
30 pixel values  $p(out)$ .

31  
32 The input datastream is firstly sampled by a sampling  
33 network consisting of line memory buffers 30 and 32,  
34 each of which is capable of storing a complete line of  
35 video data, and individual pixel value memory buffers  
36 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 and 44. The incoming video signal

1 is routed through the line buffers 30, 32 and into the  
2 pixel buffers 34 - 44 so that, over a number of clock  
3 cycles, nine pixel values for the central pixel  $p(c)$   
4 and surrounding neighbours are accumulated to be  
5 operated on by the filter system. The line buffers 30,  
6 32 suitably comprise random access memory, while the  
7 pixel buffers 34 - 44 may be D-type flip-flops.

8  
9 The central pixel value  $p(c)$  is extracted on line 46 as  
10 shown, while the eight neighbouring values are applied  
11 to block 48. Block 48 sorts the values of the  
12 neighbouring pixels into rank order according to their  
13 amplitudes, and outputs the values in rank order, with  
14 the highest value output on the upper output line 48U  
15 and the lowest value on the lower output line 48L. In  
16 this example, the filter system only employs the  
17 highest, lowest and middle two ranking values out of  
18 the eight input values. However, variations on this  
19 example could utilise other combinations of the eight  
20 ranked values, as shall be discussed further below.

21  
22 The ranked values of the neighbouring pixels are  
23 employed by both the first and second stage filter  
24 processes 18 and 22 of Fig. 2. In fact, the two filter  
25 stages share components and functions of the embodiment  
26 illustrated in Fig. 4, rather than being discrete  
27 systems as shown in Fig. 2. However, their essential  
28 functionality is separate and is in accordance with the  
29 schematic representation provided by Fig. 2.

30  
31 The first stage filtering operates to apply relatively  
32 subtle correction to the entire data stream while at  
33 the same time identifying defect locations to which the  
34 second stage filtering is to be applied, as follows.

35  
36 The highest and lowest ranked pixel values on lines 48U

1 and 48L and the central pixel value  $p(c)$  on line 46 are  
2 input to block 50, which operates as a "one from three"  
3 multiplexer. Block 50 compares  $p(c)$  with the highest  
4 and lowest ranked values. If the value of  $p(c)$  is  
5 greater than the highest ranked value then the highest  
6 ranked value is output from block 50, replacing  $p(c)$  in  
7 the data stream. If the value of  $p(c)$  is less than the  
8 lowest ranked value then the lowest ranked value is  
9 output from block 50, replacing  $p(c)$  in the data  
10 stream. If the value of  $p(c)$  is less than the highest  
11 ranked value and greater than the lowest ranked value,  
12 or is equal to either value, then the value of  $p(c)$  is  
13 output from block 50, so that  $p(c)$  is unaffected by the  
14 first stage filter.

15  
16 This filtering scheme is illustrated in Fig. 5, in  
17 which the rank of the input pixel value is plotted  
18 against the rank of the pixel value which is output by  
19 the filter. The nine ranks of this example are  
20 numbered from -4 to +4, with zero being the rank of the  
21 median pixel value. The graph shown corresponds to the  
22 scheme described above. If  $p(c)$  is ranked +4 then it  
23 is replaced by the value of rank +3. If  $p(c)$  is ranked  
24 -4 it is replaced by the value of rank -3. Otherwise  
25 it is unaffected by the filter.

26  
27 The filter could be modified to allow maximum values  
28 restricted to ranks 1 or 2, as indicated by the dot-  
29 and-dash lines, in which case different outputs from  
30 block 48 would be employed. The filter could also be  
31 made to be switchable between these different modes of  
32 operation if required. The horizontal axis of Fig. 5  
33 corresponds to a "median filter", in which the median  
34 value is output regardless of the input value. The  
35 diagonal line through the origin indicated by the  
36 dashed lines corresponds to zero filtering, in which



1 the output is always equal to the input.

2

3 Since this filtering operation is applied to the entire  
4 data stream, it acts as a general noise reduction  
5 filter as well as correcting relatively subtle defects  
6 arising from defective pixel sites in the sensor array.  
7 As such it is potentially useful in applications other  
8 than that illustrated in Figs. 2 and 4. For example,  
9 it could be employed purely as a noise reduction filter  
10 in imaging systems using prior art calibration schemes  
11 to correct sensor defects. This filtering scheme will  
12 be referred to hereinafter as a "scythe filter" and its  
13 output value as the "scythe value".

14

15 The second stage filtering 22 of Fig. 2, in this  
16 example, is based on the median value of the pixels  
17 neighbouring the central pixel  $p(c)$ . A conventional  
18 median filter applied to a  $3 \times 3$  array would output a  
19 value corresponding to the median value of the nine  
20 pixels in the array. In the present case, it is  
21 preferred to neglect the value of the central pixel,  
22 since this has already been presumed to be erroneous  
23 when the second stage filtering is applied.

24 Accordingly, a median value is calculated based on the  
25 values of the eight neighbouring pixels, excluding the  
26 central pixel  $p(c)$  as shown in Fig. 3(b). Since there  
27 is an even number of neighbouring pixels, the median  
28 value used is the mean value of the two middle ranking  
29 pixel values. The sorting of the neighbouring pixel  
30 values into rank order, described above, facilitates  
31 this. As seen in Fig. 5, the values of the two middle  
32 ranking values output from block 48 are summed and  
33 divided by two, to provide a pseudo-median value.

34

35 This filtering scheme will be referred to hereinafter  
36 as a "ring median filter" and its output as the "median

1 value".

2

3 In the example of Fig. 4, it can be seen that scythe  
4 (first stage) filtering and ring median (second stage  
5 filtering) both take place in parallel on the entire  
6 data stream. Both the scythe and median values are  
7 input to a final "one from two" multiplexer 52, the  
8 final output  $p(out)$  being determined by the contents of  
9 the defect memory 20 of Fig. 2. If the pixel location  
10 corresponding to the central pixel  $p(c)$  is stored in  
11 the defect memory 20, then multiplexer 52 will select  
12 the ring median value as the final output value.  
13 Otherwise, the final output value will be the scythe  
14 value. Since the pixel locations stored in the defect  
15 memory 20 comprise only a small proportion of the total  
16 number of pixels in the sensor array, scythe filtering  
17 will be applied to the majority of the data stream with  
18 ring median filtering being applied to the remainder.

19

20 In Fig. 4, the defect memory 20 of Fig. 2 is  
21 represented by memory block 54 and memory management  
22 block 56.

23

24 The pixel locations stored in the defect memory 20 are  
25 those which exhibit the most extreme differences from  
26 their neighbours. In the embodiment of Fig. 4, pixel  
27 locations are selected for inclusion in the defect  
28 memory on the basis of the magnitude of the difference  
29 between the value of  $p(c)$  and the scythe value output  
30 from block 50. The difference between the two values  
31 is determined at 58 and the absolute magnitude of this  
32 difference at 60. The decision as to whether a  
33 particular pixel location should be stored can be based  
34 on a wide variety of criteria, depending in part on the  
35 size of the defect memory and on the memory management  
36 strategy employed. In the present example, a simple

1 scheme is employed whereby the single worst defect  
2 (i.e. the greatest difference between the value of  $p(c)$   
3 and the scythe value) in each video frame is stored in  
4 the defect memory. For each frame, the worst defect to  
5 date is stored in buffer memory 62. At the end of the  
6 frame, the value stored at 62 is passed to the memory  
7 block 54, together with its corresponding location in  
8 the sensor array. The data stored in the memory 54 is  
9 essentially a sorted list of pixel locations and  
10 associated defect magnitudes. Additional information  
11 could be stored if necessary.

12

13 It will be understood that the beginnings and endings  
14 of video frames and the locations of pixels  
15 corresponding to pixel values in the data stream can be  
16 derived by the use of clocks, counters and information  
17 included in the data stream, in a manner which will be  
18 familiar to those skilled in the art. Systems for  
19 performing these functions will not be described herein  
20 and are excluded from the drawings for the sake of  
21 clarity.

22

23 The memory management unit 56 controls the output  
24 multiplexer 52 so as to select the ring median value as  
25 the final output when the current pixel corresponds to  
26 a location stored in the memory block 54. Otherwise,  
27 the scythe value is selected.

28

29 As noted above, a strategy is required for managing the  
30 contents of the memory block 54. This is accomplished  
31 in the present example by means of a first-order auto-  
32 regression function (also known as "leaky  
33 integration"). That is, the magnitudes of the defects  
34 stored in the memory are continually updated by means  
35 of the auto-regression formula. Once the memory 54 is  
36 full, the locations with lowest defect magnitudes can

1 be replaced by newly detected defects of greater  
2 magnitude. The magnitudes of persistent defects will  
3 be refreshed by normal operation of the filtering  
4 system, whilst the stored magnitudes of transient  
5 defects will gradually attenuate until they are  
6 replaced.

7  
8 In this example, the magnitudes of stored defects are  
9 updated by determining the difference between the  
10 current pixel value  $p(c)$  and the ring median value at  
11 64, and the absolute magnitude of this difference at  
12 66. The updated value is calculated using the auto-  
13 regression formula at 68, from the current stored value  
14 for the relevant pixel location and magnitude of the  
15 difference between  $p(c)$  and the ring median value, and  
16 the stored value is updated accordingly. The location  
17 of the current, lowest stored value is stored in memory  
18 buffer 70 so that this value (MIN) can be replaced by a  
19 new defect location and value (MAX, 62) once the memory  
20 54 is full.

21  
22 It can be seen that Fig. 2 represents a generalised  
23 version of the preferred embodiment, employing a stored  
24 list of defect locations to apply two stage filtering  
25 to an incoming data stream, with the first stage  
26 filtering also serving to determine which locations are  
27 stored and the second stage filtering being switched on  
28 and off on the basis of the stored list. As seen in  
29 Fig. 4, this functionality is implemented by applying  
30 both filtering functions in parallel and selecting  
31 which filter output to use on the basis of the stored  
32 list, with the first stage filter output also being  
33 employed in the selection of locations for storage and  
34 the second stage filter output also being employed in  
35 the management of the stored list.

36

1 Other variations of the described embodiments can be  
2 envisaged, using different filtering functions,  
3 different data sampling schemes and different memory  
4 management strategies. Such variations and other  
5 modifications and improvements may be incorporated  
6 without departing from the scope of the invention as  
7 defined in the Claims appended hereto.

8

9

1     Claims.

2

3     1.     A method of processing a video data stream  
4     comprising a series of pixel values corresponding to  
5     pixel sites in an electronic imaging device so as to  
6     correct defective pixel values, comprising filtering  
7     the video data stream in real time so as to correct or  
8     modify defective pixel values.

9

10    2.     A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the  
11    filtering of each pixel value is based on the values of  
12    a plurality of neighbouring pixel values.

13

14    3.     A method as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the  
15    filtering of each pixel value uses the value of the  
16    current pixel as part of a dataset including the values  
17    of said neighbouring pixels in determining whether  
18    and/or how to correct or modify the current pixel  
19    value.

20

21    4.     A method as claimed in any preceding Claim,  
22    further including the step of identifying those pixel  
23    values which are most severely defective, storing the  
24    locations of said most severely defective pixels in a  
25    defect store, applying a first filtering algorithm to  
26    those pixels whose locations are not stored and  
27    applying a second filtering algorithm to those pixels  
28    whose locations have been stored.

29

30    5.     A method as claimed in Claim 4, wherein the  
31    filtering of each pixel value is based on the values of  
32    a plurality of neighbouring pixel values and said first  
33    filtering algorithm uses the value of the current pixel  
34    as part of a dataset including the values of said  
35    neighbouring pixels.

36

1 6. A method as claimed in Claim 5, wherein said first  
2 filtering algorithm comprises sorting the values of the  
3 current pixel and of said neighbouring pixels into rank  
4 order and modifying the current pixel value on the  
5 basis of its place in said rank order.

6  
7 7. A method as claimed in Claim 6, wherein the value  
8 of the current pixel is modified if its rank is greater  
9 than or less than predetermined maximum and minimum  
10 rank values.

11  
12 8. A method as claimed in Claim 7, wherein:  
13 the current pixel value is replaced by the value  
14 of the pixel having said predetermined maximum rank  
15 value, if the current pixel value has a rank greater  
16 than said predetermined maximum rank value;  
17 the current pixel value is replaced by the value  
18 of the pixel having said predetermined minimum rank  
19 value, if the current pixel value has a rank less than  
20 said predetermined minimum rank value; and  
21 the current pixel value is left unchanged if the  
22 current pixel value has a rank less than said  
23 predetermined maximum rank value and greater than said  
24 predetermined minimum rank value.

25  
26 9. A method as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said  
27 predetermined maximum rank value is the highest ranking  
28 of said neighbouring pixels and said predetermined  
29 minimum rank value is the lowest ranking of said  
30 neighbouring pixels.

31  
32 10. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 9,  
33 wherein pixel locations to be stored in said defect  
34 store are selected on the basis of the output of said  
35 first filtering algorithm.

36

1 11. A method as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the  
2 decision to store a pixel location is based on the  
3 magnitude of the difference between the current pixel  
4 value and the pixel value output by said first  
5 filtering algorithm.

6  
7 12. A method as claimed in Claim 11, wherein, for each  
8 frame of video data, the location of at least that  
9 pixel value having the greatest difference in magnitude  
10 from the output of the first filtering algorithm is  
11 stored in said defect store.

12  
13 13. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 12,  
14 wherein the filtering of each pixel value is based on  
15 the values of a plurality of neighbouring pixel values  
16 and said second filtering algorithm excludes the value  
17 of the current pixel from a dataset including the  
18 values of said neighbouring pixels.

19  
20 14. A method as claimed in Claim 13, wherein said  
21 second filtering algorithm replaces the value of the  
22 current pixel with the median value of said  
23 neighbouring pixels.

24  
25 15. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 14,  
26 wherein the information stored in said defect store  
27 includes the location of each pixel selected for  
28 storage and information indicating the severity of the  
29 defect.

30  
31 16. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 15,  
32 wherein the contents of the defect store are updated in  
33 accordance with a predetermined memory management  
34 algorithm.

35  
36 17. A method as claimed in Claim 16, wherein said



1 defect store includes the location of each pixel  
2 selected for storage and information indicating the  
3 severity of the defect, and wherein said information  
4 regarding the severity of the defect is updated on the  
5 basis of an auto-regression function applied to the  
6 current value of each stored pixel value, the current  
7 output from the second filtering algorithm and the  
8 current stored value.

9  
10 18. A method as claimed in any one of Claims 4 to 17,  
11 wherein said first and second filtering algorithms are  
12 applied to the video data stream in parallel and the  
13 final output pixel value is selected from the outputs  
14 of the first and second filtering algorithm depending  
15 on whether the corresponding pixel location is present  
16 in the defect store.

17  
18 19. Apparatus for processing a video data stream  
19 comprising electronic filter means adapted to implement  
20 the method as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 19.

21  
22 20. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, comprising means  
23 for sampling a video data stream in order to obtain a  
24 data set comprising a current pixel value and a  
25 plurality of neighbouring pixel values.

26  
27 21. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 20, further  
28 including means for sorting said neighbouring pixel  
29 values into rank order.

30  
31 22. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 21, further  
32 including means for comparing the current pixel value  
33 with neighbouring pixel values of selected ranks and  
34 for generating a first filter output on the basis of  
35 said comparison.

36

1     23. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 22, further  
2     including means for determining the median value of  
3     said neighbouring pixels and generating a second filter  
4     output equal to said median value.

5

6     24. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 23, further  
7     including a defect store for storing pixel locations  
8     selected on the basis of said first filter output.

9

10    25. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 23, further  
11    including output means for generating a final output  
12    pixel value selected from said first and second filter  
13    outputs on the basis of the contents of said defect  
14    store.

15

16    26. An electronic imaging system including an image  
17    sensor array having an output connected to apparatus as  
18    claimed in any one of Claims 19 to 25.

19

20    27. A method of filtering a video data stream  
21    comprising a series of pixel values corresponding to  
22    pixel sites in an electronic imaging device, wherein  
23    the filtering of each pixel value is based on the  
24    values of a plurality of neighbouring pixel values  
25    using the value of the current pixel as part of a  
26    dataset including the values of said neighbouring  
27    pixels, and wherein said filtering comprises sorting  
28    the values of the current pixel and of said  
29    neighbouring pixels into rank order and modifying the  
30    current pixel value on the basis of its place in said  
31    rank order.

32

33    28. A method as claimed in Claim 27, wherein the value  
34    of the current pixel is modified if its rank is greater  
35    than or less than predetermined maximum and minimum  
36    rank values.

- 1     29. A method as claimed in Claim 28, wherein:  
2         the current pixel value is replaced by the value  
3     of the pixel having said predetermined maximum rank  
4     value, if the current pixel value has a rank greater  
5     than said predetermined maximum rank value;  
6         the current pixel value is replaced by the value  
7     of the pixel having said predetermined minimum rank  
8     value, if the current pixel value has a rank less than  
9     said predetermined minimum rank value; and  
10        the current pixel value is left unchanged if the  
11    current pixel value has a rank less than said  
12    predetermined maximum rank value and greater than said  
13    predetermined minimum rank value.  
14
- 15    30. A method as claimed in Claim 29, wherein said  
16    predetermined maximum rank value is the highest ranking  
17    of said neighbouring pixels and said predetermined  
18    minimum rank value is the lowest ranking of said  
19    neighbouring pixels.  
20
- 21    31. Apparatus for processing a video data stream  
22    comprising electronic filter means adapted to implement  
23    the method as defined in any one of Claims 27 to 30.  
24
- 25    32. An electronic imaging system including an image  
26    sensor array having an output connected to apparatus as  
27    claimed in Claim 31.  
28

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FIG. 1

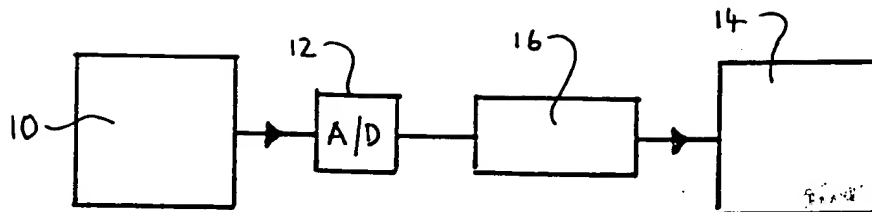
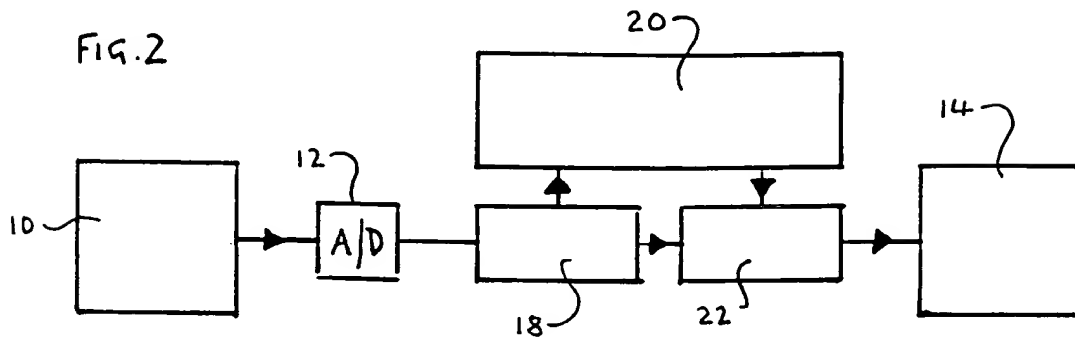


FIG. 2



$p(c)$

✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓

FIG. 3(a)

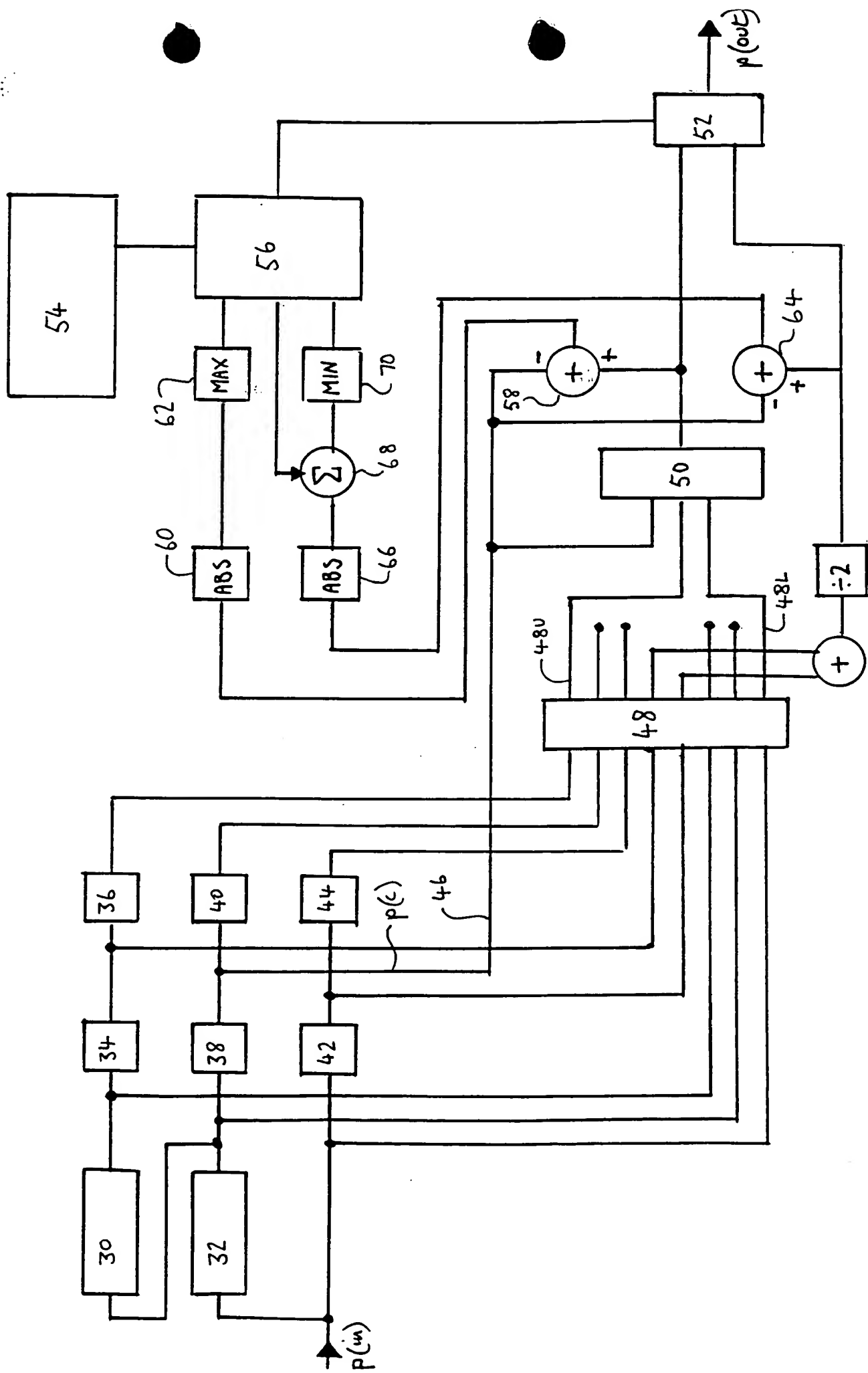
✓	✓	✓
✓	X	✓
✓	✓	✓

$p(c)$

FIG. 3(b)

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FIG. 4



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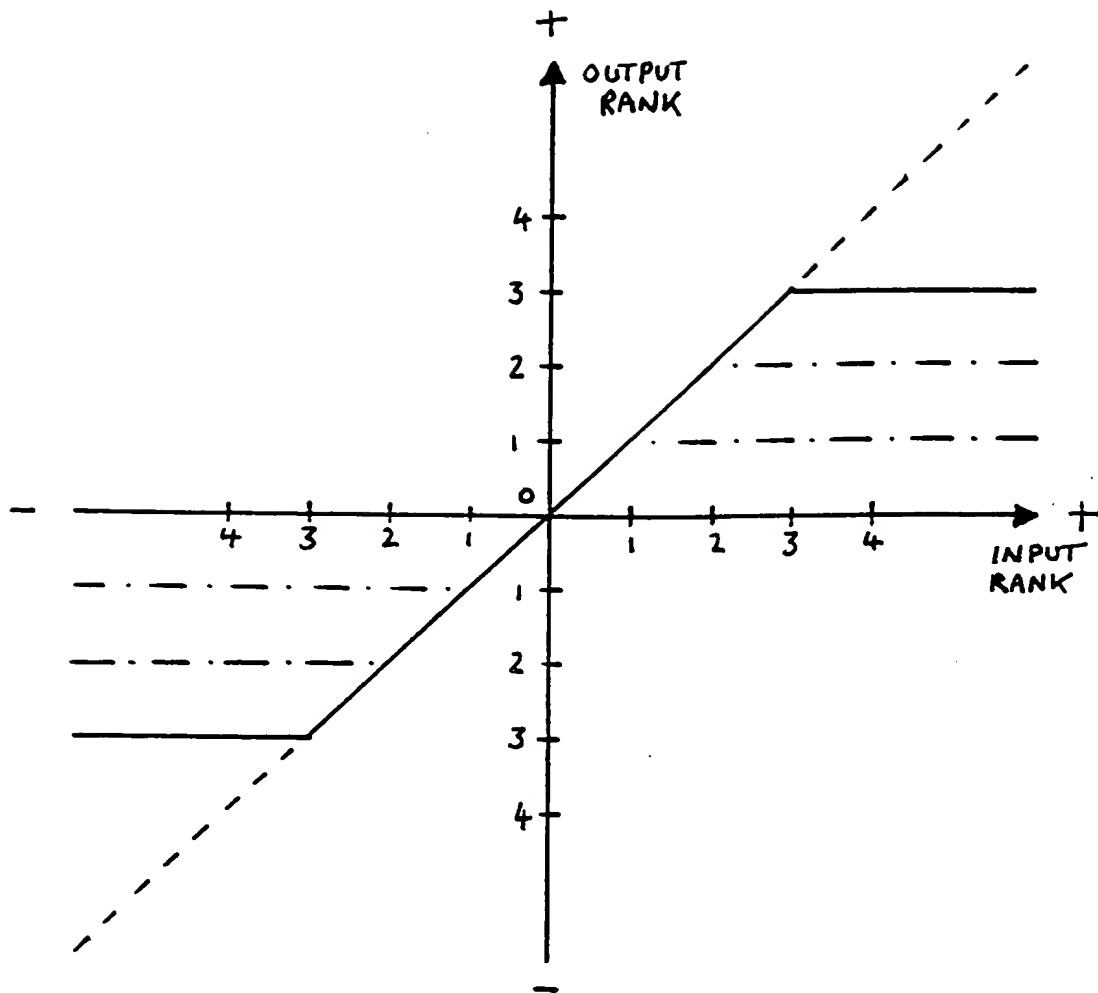


FIG. 5

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